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JULY – AUGUST 1956

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# The Reformed Journal

A PERIODICAL OF REFORMED COMMENT AND OPINION

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## The Synod of 1956
By JAMES DAANE

## Opportunities for Scholarship
By DIRK JELLEMA

## Nationalism and Christian Missions
By EDGAR H. SMITH

## Pages From the Past
By THE EDITORS

## John Schepers
By J. G. VANDEN BOSCH

## Open Door for All Sinners
By GEORGE STOB

## Church and Old Testament History
By CARL KROMMINGA

# Notes and Letters . . .

Sirs:

May I voice my appreciation of *The Reformed Journal.* It sheds light on many problems that we do not get in our church papers. I enjoy it very much. It gives the layman an opportunity to influence our churches as is demonstrated in the article, "The Elder at the Meeting of Classis" by William Boer.

This article reminds me of a conversation I had with an elder last year. It runs about as follows:

I said to the Brother, "Well, you do not have many meetings of the Consistory to attend due to the rotating system and you will be out." "Yes," he said, "I have one more meeting of the Consistory to attend and that is the last. I will not be an elder any more in the future." I said, "How come, Brother, that you do not desire to serve our churches in that capacity?" "Well," he said, "I am getting tired of being a rubber stamp for the ministers. Now don't get me wrong, I have nothing against our minister but it's the system which brings it along. Just look at it once. As an elder or deacon you are elected for two or three years. You know nothing of the problems that existed before you were in and you are asked to pass judgment on them. Next, take the Classis — due to the rotating system you are lucky if you attend one meeting of the Classis, while the minister is at every meeting, and you are to make decisions on every matter that comes up. Next take Synod — due to the rotating system the elders that are elected know very little about the problems and must simply say "yes" to what the ministers say. The ministers have their conferences and the layman is barred. You know by your own experience what chance the layman has to influence our churches by way of the church papers."

(*Continued on page* 22)

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NOTES AND LETTERS

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# The Synod of 1956

by James Daane

ATTENDANCE AT A Christian Reformed Synod can e a disappointing experience. It could be that es-ecially for a first-time delegate who expects at-ndance at Synod to be a kind of lark, or an all-xpenses-paid restful vacation. But Synod is not nat kind of thing. The almost unbroken 8:30 A.M. 10:00 P.M. round of Synodical sessions and com-nittee meetings soon convinces hopeful first-timers nat stomach ulcers and tired nerves would have ared much better at a mountain resort or a cottage y the sea. But if delegates are only disappointed, here is chance of easy recovery. Disappointments an be soon forgotten by new appointments to busi-ess or pleasure. The pain of disappointment has nly short life.

Attendance at Synods can also, however, be a dis-lusioning experience. The experience of disillu-onment brings a deeper hurt to a man's spirit, and its a wound that stays in the soul of the delegate ng after his return home. Synod, you see, is the rganized Church in action, and the behavior of the rganization is often hard on a man's ideals and dealism. It is possible for a man's faith to be more orely tried at a Synod than it is in the world — or a Synod, like any organization governed by in-titutional interests and subject to institutional ressures, can kill high hopes, unspirit one's aspira-ons, and grind high ideals into the ground.

Organized religion can frequently do what a Chris-an man would scarcely think of doing. An ecclesi-stical assembly is easily motivated by calculating xpediency, enervating timidity, and by such fear f consequences that even the true and the right ail to get due honor and consideration. When that appens, there can be a great deal of "worldliness" a Synod. Or otherwise, in the spirit of weakness nd fear, issues are dodged, actions postponed, de-sions delegated to future Synods, and vexing prob-ms transferred without hope to new study com-nittees. When this happens, as it frequently does. elegates may go home with disillusioned spirits, a olted faith, and a really deep fear for the future of he Church.

*I*t may safely be said, however, that the Chris-an Reformed Synod was not a Synod that gave ause for this kind of disillusionment. On the con-rary, the mind and spirit of the Synod of 1956, oth in official sessions, and in unofficial fellow-hip, was like a breath of fresh wind singing with strong hope for the future. It has been my privilege to be three times delegated to Synods. In addition I have visited many others. In my judgment this Synod was the finest of them all. As the Synod got more deeply into its task, it was frequently said by delegates, and visitors, in appraisal of her work and spirit: "This is a good Synod." It was, indeed, a good Synod. It was surely not a "Do-Nothing Synod." This Synod was impatient of postponement and indecision. It wanted action and was willing it-self to produce action. In contrast to many previ-ous Synods, this Synod appointed few committees into whose lap to throw vexing problems for future Synods to decide. This Synod assumed for itself the responsibility of taking decisive action.

This Synod, however, was not prone to rash and ill-advised action. It did not act with disregard for careful and sound thought. Where inadequate thought had been given to a proposed action, com-mittees were formed and mandates given to study the problem. A case in point was the creation of the Long-Range Planning Committee, to which was given the task of studying such problems as: the relation of Calvin's development to the growing Junior College movement, the propriety of church ownership and maintenance of Calvin College, and the question of a just distribution of the cost-burden of Calvin upon the various sections of our denomina-tion.

When it was judged that thought and reflection had done their human best, the Synod of 1956 de-manded action. A case in point here was the action taken regarding the Church's position on the mem-bership of those divorced and remarried. This prob-lem had been the object of the Church's study, re-flection, and prayers for decades. Notwithstanding, another attempt was made at this Synod to post-pone action. But this Synod showed that it was ill-disposed to postpone action again, and it decisively voted to face and settle the issue. If there had been some solid assurance that there was yet new light to be cast on the old problem, Synod would have been willing to wait. But when it became evi-dent that the alleged "new light" was only an un-known possibility, and that the "new light" did not in fact exist, not even in the form of a glimmer, Synod decided to stand squarely up to the time for decision. Afterward, by a strong and conclusive majority, Synod took the position that no substan-tial and conclusive evidence had been produced to support the long held traditional position that re-

## The Synod of 1956 — Continued

marriage after unbiblical divorce is a living in continuous adultery. With that decision the traditional position fell.

This action took spiritual courage. It also took genuine humility. For it ought not to be overlooked that it is difficult for a church to admit error and to live by the grace of God's forgiveness. Nonetheless, at this point, the Biblical faith of the Christian Reformed Church proved stronger than the power of a strong tradition.

The final surrender of our traditional position on divorce was not so much the result of particular exegetical arguments, as of a fine Christian awareness that our former position violated the very spirit of the gospel of grace. This is not to say that exegetical arguments did not play their role. They did play an important role. But an assembly of Synod, where the decision had finally to be made, is hardly the place for detailed exegetical study and argumentation. Apart from a few ministers who have made a special study of the matter, few are capable of making critical exegetical judgments. It was, I think, an intuitive spiritual awareness on the part of our membership that our former position could not be harmonized with a gospel of forgiveness, that finally brought about the rejection of our historic position.

This growing spiritual perception had been clarified and intensified by our experience in an expanding missionary program. The Indian Missionary Conference gave expression to this awareness when it urged Synod to consider that it was almost impossible for them to do missionary work on the basis of the old position. I mention all this because it indicates something wholesome about our churches. If the decision had to await a clear understanding by the membership of the Church of the exegetical and logical arguments, no decision would ever have been reached — for on this level of approach the argument is exceedingly complex and intricate. It is a tribute to our membership that the Church was possessed of a fine spiritual sensitivity for the gospel and was able by means of it to arrive at the right answer to a very intricate problem. This understanding of the gospel gives good hope for the future, for it indicates that our churches do have a genuine feeling for the gospel, and have not lost the touch of Christ.

This became obvious at still another point. After Synod had decided that there was no convincing Biblical evidence for our traditional position, an attempt was made to get Synod officially to make a negative pronouncement — namely, that it had *not* been proved from the Bible that unbiblically divorced and remarried people are *not* living in continuous adultery. This negative proposition contained log cal and religious subtleties of the first order. Su pose the proposition were true (which is high questionable). Even in that case Synod would ha no right to make such a pronouncement. F Synod has no right to speak where the Bible has n spoken. And Synod surely has no ethical right declare on the one hand that the Bible does n teach that such unbiblically divorced and remarri people are living in adultery, and then, on the bas of the silence of the Bible, officially declare th nonetheless such people may very well be living continuous adultery.

It is a very dangerous thing to make positive pr nouncements on the basis of a negativity, and speak on something on which the Bible is silent. A it is a good deal more than dangerous to decla officially that the Bible *does not say* that certa people *are not* living in continuous adultery, a thus on the basis of Biblical silence to place a b question mark over the moral character of su people. It is doubtful that the delegates were fu aware of the logical and ethical implications of su a negative proposition at first. But there was stro suspicion that the Church was being tempted this negative proposition to say what she sur ought not to say — and it was decisively reject by a large vote. This, too, I think, was an indi tion, not that the members of Synod were "Phi delphia lawyers," but that they intuitively and stinctively sensed that such a proposition was violation of the very ethics of the gospel. It w sensed, rather than clearly understood, that th can be no Biblical sanction for that which the Bi does *not* say — not even when the Church decla that the Bible does not say it.

It was said on the floor of Synod that on t matter of divorce and remarriage the Church w far ahead of her Synods. I think there was cons erable truth in this remark. Synods and minist frequently get lost in subtle argumentations a cannot find the way with certainty to the solution a problem, while the Church herself, confronted w the ethical problems of actual life, instinctiv knows the right Christian answer. Just as theol is really forged in the pulpit, and not in ivory a demic towers, ethical insight and decision are of achieved not necessarily in study committees wh deal with such matters abstractly (in terms of and Mrs. X) but in the body of the Church wh faces these problems in terms of life's concrete si ations.

Even casual reflections on the 1956 Sy would not be complete without reference to t other matters.

The first concerns the performance of the el at the Synod of 1956. I have never attende

Synod where elders played so leading and so decisive a role. There is a tendency for elders to come to Synods to watch and to follow (and who can blame them for that?), rather than to lead and play a decisive role. But the elders of the Synod of 1956 showed a most encouraging independence of responsible thought and action. Whereas at most Synods elders tend to follow the ministers, the order of procession seemed at times to have been reversed at the Synod of 1956. At times it appeared that the ministers were following the elders, and that was a most welcome thing, for it gave assurance that wisdom is not always robed. One elder protected his right to think and speak for himself by asserting: "I pay my own way." In brief, the leadership asserted and the role played by laymen was heartening and promises well for the future. As more of our laymen obtain an education, the difference between laymen and ministers on the floor of Synod will lessen, and our churches will be less and less under the exclusive leadership of the ministers.

The second matter concerns the presence and influence at Synod of the Canadian churches. This is a new factor and one that will call for increasing recognition. The Canadian churches will be both a help and a hindrance to the Christian Reformed Church, as the Church will be to them. This is to be expected, for the leaders and members of the Canadian churches think and speak out of a Continental background, and we out of an American. The Canadian people surely helped us on the problem of divorce and remarriage, coming as they did from a Reformed Church that never held our old position. On the other hand, on the matter of separate Christian labor organizations, they are a complicating factor. The positions to which they are committed do not necessarily hold for the American scene. On this score, mutual patience will be needed by both Canadians and Americans, and both can learn from the other. Similarly, the Canadian sector of our Church further complicates the matter of a Church-owned college. Not only is this principle contrary to the convictions of many of those who come from the Netherlands, but there is the further practical matter that Calvin-trained teachers are not as such eligible to teach in Canadian schools.

But if the facility with which the Canadian Hollanders already speak the English language is indicative of their desire to know the American scene, then the only real question is whether we Americans will as readily learn from them. One thing is certain: with the addition of the Canadian churches, the Christian Reformed Church will never be the same. Things will be different — whether for better or for worse. But there is present in this situation a potential that can make the change one that will serve for the enrichment of our Church on both sides of the boundary.

The church has not received Scripture from God in order simply to rest on it, and still less in order to bury this treasure in earth. On the contrary the church is called to preserve this Word of God, to explain it, to preach it, apply it, translate it, spread it abroad, recommend it, and defend it — in a word, to cause the thoughts of God, laid down in Scripture, to triumph everywhere and at all times over the thoughts of man. All of the work to which the church is called is the effort at, and the ministration of, the Word of God. It is a service of this Word of God when it is preached in the assembly of believers, is interpreted, and applied, when it is shared in the signs of the covenant, and is maintained in discipline. And in a larger sense much more is part and parcel of this service of the Word: this, for example, that in our own hearts and lives, in our profession and business, in house and field and office, in science and art, in state and community, in works of mercy and missions, and in all spheres and ways of life, this Word be applied, worked out, and made to rule. The church must be the pillar and ground of truth (I Tim. 3:15): that is to say, a pedestal and foundation bearing up the truth and maintaining and establishing it over against the world. When the church neglects and forgets this, the church is remiss in its duty and undermines its own existence.

—Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*

# Opportunities for Scholarship

by Dirk Jellema

TO DEVELOP the implications of Calvinism as a world-and-life-view, scholars are needed. As the Centennial of our Church approaches, it might be of interest to consider whether we are encouraging such scholarship as well as we might. One way of getting at that question is to compare the facilities which we as a Church have made available to our scholars at Calvin College with the facilities available at other small liberal arts colleges. In such a comparison, how does our Church stand? Is our record good, average, or poor?

Facilities available to scholars — or, roughly, encouragement of professional scholarship — are difficult to measure, of course. But two sets of figures can be used to give a general idea. First, the library research tools available to the scholar; and, second, the ratio of students to teachers in the school, which helps determine the amount of time the scholar has available to use the research tools.[1]

Let us first consider the tools available for research, or, the number of books in the library. We can use two sources of information: for rough comparisons, the 1952 figures given in handy form in Lovejoy's *College Guide* 1953-1954; and, for accurate comparisons, the 1955 figures given in more unwieldly form in *American Universities and Colleges* 1956, published a few months ago.

Suppose we compare the number of books in Calvin's library with those in the libraries of ten well-known small liberal arts colleges. We can use Lovejoy's 1952 figures, with the 1955 figure for Calvin.

The ten well-known schools, picked at random from a longer list of such schools, rank as follows. First, Oberlin (490,000). Then follow Amherst (284,000), Bryn Mawr (230,000), Bowdoin (220,000), Lawrence (190,000), Haverford (183,000), Beloit (172,000), Carleton (155,000), Kenyon (125,000), Antioch (79,000). In comparison with these 1952 figures, Calvin's 1955 figure is 63,000. The number of books in Calvin Library is less than one-third of the average holdings of the ten other schools.[2]

1. The time available depends on two things: the student-teacher ratio and the number of contact hours the teacher has. "Contact hours" are not the same as "working hours." A minister has two "contact hours" per week, but works many more. So also the college teacher. The average number of contact hours ("teaching load") at Calvin is probably around 15, double that at many schools. It is difficult to find comparative listings.

2. Harvard's figure, for comparason, was 5,500,000 in 1952.

But suppose we compare our College not with the top small schools in the country, but with a more average sample. How do the facilities we as Church have made available to scholars at Calvin compare with those of other small Michigan colleges?

There are fifteen small colleges in Michigan besides Calvin, four of them Roman Catholic. The eleven non-Catholic schools rank as follows (1955): Michigan Normal (113,000), Albion (85,000), Central Michigan (80,000), Michigan College of Mining (70,000), Calvin (63,000), Alma (59,000), Hope (54,000), Northern Michigan (53,000), Kalamazoo (53,000), Emmanuel Missionary (50,000), Hillsdale (35,000).[3] Thus Calvin stands fifth among the eleven; its holdings (63,000) are slightly below the average of the eleven (65,000).

Suppose we compare with some other Midwestern states. Lovejoy's more convenient listing can be used. The average of the twenty-three small non-Catholic accredited colleges in Ohio was 94,000 in 1952. The average of the seven in Minnesota was 69,000; of the thirteen in Indiana, 72,000; of the twelve in Wisconsin, 62,000; of the eighteen in Illinois, 56,000; of the first twelve listed under Pennsylvania, 90,000. Thus an examination of eighty-five other Midwestern small colleges again shows that the library facilities made available to scholars at Calvin by our Church is slightly below average.

We can now move on and see how the student-teacher ratio, which is a rough measure of the time made available for scholarship, compares. The higher the number of students per ten teachers, the less time there will be for scholarship.

Let us first again compare the ratio we as Church have given our scholars at Calvin with the ratio given to scholars at ten well-known small liberal arts colleges, using the same ten "name colleges" we used before.

They rank as follows (1952): Bryn Mawr, 60 students per *ten* teachers; Kenyon and Haverford, 90; Lawrence, Amherst and Bowdoin, 100; Beloit, 110; Antioch and Carleton, 120; Oberlin, 130. Calvin

3. "Small college" is here used to mean a college with enrollment under 5,000. Calvin's enrollment is close to the average of the eleven. The holdings of the five Catholic schools are: Marygrove (72,000), Siena Heights (33,000), Nazareth (27,000), Aquinas (26,000), Mercy (22,000).

1955 ratio was 230, about one-third as good as the average of the ten schools.[4]

Suppose we compare Calvin with the ten non-Catholic small colleges in Michigan, using 1955 figures. They rank as follows (students per *ten* teachers): Kalamazoo, 100; Northern Michigan, 110; Michigan Normal, Michigan Mining, and Hope, 120; Alma, 113; Albion and Hillsdale, 140; Central Michigan, 150; Emmanuel Missionary, 160. This averages out to 130.[5]

Calvin's ratio, in comparison, was 220.

Next we compare this with the 1952 figures from our eighty-five Midwestern small colleges. The ratios in the twenty-three Ohio small colleges averaged 130; in the seven Minnesota, 130; in the twelve Wisconsin, 140; in the thirteen Indiana, 160; in the eighteen Illinois, 140; in the twelve from Pennsylvania, 130. Calvin's 1955 ratio, in comparison, was 220.

If we compare this (220) figure with the four-hundred-three small colleges (accredited, non-Catholic, reporting enrollment under 5,000) listed by Lovejoy, only *sixteen* of these rank below Calvin.

Thus it would seem that the facilities as to *time* which we as a Church have given our scholars at Calvin are far below the national average, and, indeed, in the lowest 5 per cent of national ranking.

In conclusion, then, we might sum up by giving our Church a grade on what it has done in providing facilities for scholarship for Calvinist scholars on our College faculty. So far as library holdings (research tools) are concerned, our Church's work would rate a C to C-minus. So far as student-teacher ratio is concerned, our Church's work would rate a D-minus to F.

Would it be too much to say that we as a Church should consider how we may improve in this matter? As Dr. Henry Meeter said a generation ago (AFRYMS *Vital Issues*, 1934, p. 5), "As a Calvinist, it is not a matter of choice whether you interest yourself in cultural matters: it is a duty." Perhaps, as our Church's Centennial approaches, we as a Church might look over what we have done for Calvinistic scholarship, and if improvement is needed, bend our shoulders to the wheel.

4. Enrollments at these schools range from Haverford, 485, to Oberlin, 2,250, in 1952. For purposes of comparison, here are some other 1952 student-teacher ratios (students per *ten* teachers): Harvard, 40; Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 50; Naval Academy at Annapolis, 70. S-T ratios run roughly like golf scores; a ratio of, say, 110, is a fair average score.

5. The five Catholic schools have ratios ranging from 100 to 130.

If the church is really an organism, a living body, this implies that it comprises many and various members, each of whom receives his own name and place, his own function and calling inside the whole. If they were all one organ, one member, where were the body? (I Cor. 12:19). For as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members are members of that one body, so it is for the church (I Cor. 12:12). Every member of the church, accordingly, receives from Christ his own gift, modest or small as it may be, and with that gift he is to serve not himself but the church. According to the nature of the gift which each has received, he must minister to the brethren, as a good steward of the manifold grace of God (I Peter 4:10). He did not receive his ability for himself but to profit withal (I Cor. 12:7), to the edification of the church (I Cor. 14:12), to the care of others even as they care for him.

In its rich variegation, therefore, the church of Christ remains a *unity*. That is to say not merely that there has always been but one church and there will always be but one; it means to say also that this church is always and everywhere the same, having the same benefits, privileges, and goods. The unity is not one which accrues to the church from the outside, which is imposed upon it by force, that is called into being by contractual arrangement, or is temporarily organized against a common enemy. It does not even come up out of the social instincts of the religious life. It is a unity, rather, which is spiritual in character. It depends upon and has its foundation and example in the unity which exists between the Father and Christ as Mediator (John 17:21-23). It is a unity which comes up out of Christ as the vine who gives rise to all the branches and who nourishes them (John 15:5), as the head in whom the whole body has its growth (Eph. 4:16); and it is brought into being by that one Spirit with whom we are led to one Father. The love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit are the portion of every believer, of every local church, and of the church in its entirety. In this consists its profound and immutable unity.

—Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*

# Nationalism and Christian Missions

by Edgar H. Smith

THE WORLD is continuing to change rapidly. Nations which, at the turn of the century, were unaware of their nationhood and some which did not then exist are all clamoring for their rights. In the light of these changes it is well and timely that the Christian Church reconsider its missionary program and adjust it to suit the rise of nationalism.

At first sight it may appear inappropriate to speak of "the rise" of nationalism, for nationalism is as old as the tower of Babel. Moreover, where Christ's Church is concerned, there has been a determined effort to remove "the middle wall of partition" between Jew and Gentile ever since Christ uttered the great commission and St. Paul traveled extensively to put it into effect. However, speaking of the world at large, there has been a great resurgence of racialism, or nationalism, in these post-war years.

### The Impositions of Imperialism

We know that in the nineteenth century overcrowded Europe had to find room for expansion if the middle and upper classes were to maintain their level of living. Reports of intrepid missionaries, traders and explorers were scanned until one government after another brought its influence to bear upon likely portions of the earth other than their own. Sometimes this was by infiltration as in China or Japan, sometimes by occupation, as in India or Africa. Intelligence, a show of power, diplomacy — these most often won the day.

Where the foreigner went, his way of life accompanied him. He took with him his methods of government, his ways of home life. He built the type of buildings common to his homeland and carried with him as many of the amenities and protections as he could. Given sufficient time these innovations had an ever-widening effect on the land which was invaded.

Medicines were made available to the native population and health improved. To obtain help in the lesser clerical tasks, or else to make it possible that the Scriptures be read, simple education was introduced. This proved to be a growing snowball which has become gigantic in its proportions. Moreover, through the benefits of a defined form of government backed by power, in place of less well-defined systems, an inevitable change took place in the common populace. A new door was opened and greater light shone in.

### One World

Concurrently with these local changes, which were taking place all over the world, came the phenomenal shrinkage of the world itself. The late Wendell Wilkie was right in envisioning it as one world. The world today is narrower, more public, and with far less privacy than it has ever known. Planes enable us to circle the globe in a few days and even the Poles have ceased to be a barrier. The radio circumvents the earth in a lightning flash of time. Nothing is distant, nothing is private. New and little nations like Israel and Jordan glare at each other and the whole earth trembles for fear of global war. Well it might do so, with the stock piles of H-bombs ever increasing in size. It has become a little world so that the hitherto unknown national is traveling to its remotest confines, studying, soldiering and learning at a prodigious rate.

### National Reaction

The United States of America is not a true instance of the thing we have in mind but it will serve to show that, when a like culture and a similar degree of intelligence is found in the settler as with the imperial overlords, then the foreign power is ousted by the "natives." In other places and at later dates, it has taken natives time to assess their invaders, and much longer to approach their educational standards. By and large it may now be said that natives have done so to a sufficient degree to know that they have not been fairly treated on all counts, and also to feel that they have sufficient intelligence to run their own affairs. In the past they have been used as cheap labor to produce exports at a low price whereby the foreigner has benefited at their expense.

Reaction was inevitable and need not be explained. Sometimes it was very bitter and the rift complete as in China . . . a China which was spoiling for this as long ago as the Boxer riots of 1900. In India and Pakistan it was just as complete and was accompanied by much internal bloodshed. There, however, relationships with Western powers are more cordial and these countries still make use of Western industrialists, teachers and medical workers — but now on their own terms.

Elsewhere in the Far East, in Burma or Ceylon, in the Gold Coast or Nigeria, transition is accepted as inevitable and has already taken effect, or is in

process of taking effect, with some measure of friendly feeling. But in other territories, such as French Africa, South Africa, or Kenya, where large populations of foreigners have grown up, there is considerable unwillingness to forego anything in favor of nationalism. Hence the fearful and growing bloodshed in North Africa. Delay may be obtained by keeping the masses in ignorance but, in the long run, a show-down seems inevitable.

The imperialism of our forefathers is dead. The rule of foreign powers in other lands throughout the world is rapidly diminishing and disappearing. It must be admitted that foreign authority is on the way out. Where this is not so it is because the intruder is numerous — so much so that his removal is unlikely and other remedies will have to be worked out.

### Christian Missions

May we reiterate that countries overrun by foreign powers for a few score years did benefit greatly from such invasions. Better methods of agriculture were learned and new crops were introduced. World markets were opened up for these countries and, nowadays, a good price is paid for their products. They were also enabled to import goods from the ends of the earth. They imitated the foreigner and built better buildings. Health-giving medicines and the benefit of medical research became theirs, and education brought its blessings.

In much of this activity Christian Missions took a leading part together with the spiritual ministry which formed the main purpose of Missions. From one hundred to one hundred and fifty years ago the great Christian missionary leaders set forth for India, Burma, China and Africa. They were the spearhead of the attack for the kingdom of God against the powers of darkness.

Both they and the great army which has followed them have not been concerned to make a profit at the peoples' expense. On the contrary, they have made a tremendous and gratuitous contribution to the wellbeing of mankind. They set forth at the same time as the greedy trader, often preceding the officers of governments. In fact governments often waited years for missionary and trade reports before taking final decisions to enter. Where Western governments did enter, even if it were only to set up consular services for their own citizens, the missionary enjoyed, as well as others, the protection of the power to which he belonged. He was able to continue his ministry unmolested. Sometimes diplomacy required that he be curtailed in his activities but he was rarely cut off altogether. This protection was beneficial but it associated him with the foreign powers in the minds of the people.

### Mission Ministry

"They went everywhere preaching the word" was said of the persecuted Christians following the death of the martyr Stephen. This is the only true justification for Missions and must ever loom large in the overall ministry. It has been true in the past and is today that where the hearers are downtrodden, poverty stricken, outcast or fearfully superstitious in animistic beliefs, there the gospel has had great success. Where the people are better off, more cultured or subject to better developed religious systems, there the results are less evident but nonetheless are to be found. Even among Muslims there has been fruit, though, probably, it has been the least.

Where there has been true spiritual fruit, fruit of the Cross of Christ, there has been planted internally a living, spiritual, organism against which the gates of hell cannot prevail. Let me repeat that wherever there is a communion of believers in Jesus Christ there you have the Church of Jesus Christ. This is the vital and inerradicable contribution which Christian Missions has made to the world.

In accomplishing this primary task Christian Missions has conferred many another benefit upon believers and unbelievers alike in the services which it has rendered. For instance, terrible physical suffering required that mercy be shown by Christians if they would demonstrate their gospel in practical fashion. As a result of this the simple case of medicines which David Livingstone, and thousands like him, used has become an enormous medical institution which circles the globe.

Or again, something more permanent than oral preaching was required to make the Message of lasting effect. This has meant that hundreds of Babel's languages have been learned and reduced to writing. The entire Scriptures, or portions of them, have been printed. Illiterates have learned to read, thus allowing the Book to make the impact it should. Dr. Laubach claims that twenty million illiterates are learning to read each year.

This has opened wide the door to learning. From simple literacy classes, primary and secondary schools have developed. For the provision of teachers and pastors colleges have been established. To assume his rightful place in his nation, and among learned men, the intelligent national, often of lowly birth, is attending national and foreign universities.

In this appetite for learning Christian Missions has become, it would seem, inextricably involved with the systems of higher education. Generally speaking, medical and educational institutions now embrace a disproportionate share of missionary personnel.

# Nationalism and Christian Missions
Continued

### Farewell to Missions

The contributions which Missions and governments have made to the nationals of other lands has brought about, to a lesser or greater extent, their own dismissal. In China dismissal was total. In India it is partial — in many Muslim states it was never anything other than partial occupation. In Africa all is in flux and the future is uncertain. The modes of missionary activity of only thirty years ago are now outdated and are on the wane. What is more, the missionary is no longer a god-like being from afar but is now known to be a man of clay like other men.

Foreign Missions are not without blame. The kingdom of God is spiritual and other-worldly, but that missionary is a rarity who can be likened to the patriarch Abraham, who dwelt in tents and sought a city whose architect and builder was God. We have proudly taken our earthly nationality with us. Our dress proclaims it, our inability or unwillingness to speak the local language witnesses to it, our homes of Western and modern style demonstrate it, our imported foods and our habits declare it daily and set up barriers between us and those we would serve. The superiority complex of the white race has been much in evidence and has done despite to our religion of humility. To the extent to which we failed to identify ourselves with the people, to that extent we have failed. Only let it be remembered that identification, while manifested in outward ways, is primarily a matter of the heart.

Let it also be remembered that even though pioneer missionaries did precede governments, yet later, and for many decades, Missions and governments have proceeded side by side, and this has undoubtedly led the nationals to identify the missionaries and the governments. Should a change-over of governments take place with a measure of distrust, it is but to be expected that the mission will be suspect and may lose its place. In China this was so; there even the native Christians closely associated with ousted missions are suspected by the new ruling powers.

We must reckon with this, that the type of mission known in the past must now give way to something different. The old has had its day. True, it may last a few decades here and there, but we must now rethink Missions in the light of an emphasized nationalism which has taken hold of the world. Nationalism is not wrong. It has come about not a little by the contributions which Christian Missions has made in the countries it served. Nationalism may, indeed, assert itself in obnoxious ways, and those who have striven so hard may lose "face" instead of earning gratitude. The older missions and familiar missionaries may continue t be tolerated in the place of their adoption but, some times, their new and younger counterparts will b refused admission.

### Profit or Loss?

Has the last century of world-wide missionar effort by the Church of Christ been wasted? Go forbid that one should ever think so. We preache the gospel, and that was, and is, our bounden dut We must go to all the creation, to every creature This is our task. We have given our money an energy to lesser things, but changes should onl serve to make us rethink the situation. Even sup posing that there are only left to us five years her or ten years there, let us get busy and preach th gospel and not argue about the expenditure require to fulfill that essential ministry.

Wasted? What foolishness! Tens of thousanc of precious souls have been redeemed. Their r generation by the Spirit of Christ means that spi itual life, the life of God, is now present to abic in a score of lands and in hundreds of tribes. Th is the Church of Christ. The physical presence c the missionary is a blessing but it is not indispen able to the well-being of Christ's own body. Tha a missionary will wish to continue until the ver last moment is most desirable; but when God's i exorable providence closes the door, let him leav knowing that what Christ has made alive will li for ever.

Indeed the Spirit will try every man's work what sort it is and much that was unnecessary w burn away to ashes, but the essential, the blesse Church of the Redeemer, will remain. It will al prosper. Much that is the earmark of the foreign will be erased in time, but that which bears t hallmark of Christ will continue. It is reasonab to suppose that God is using these methods so th the younger churches may assert themselves their own behalf and bring that contribution to t Church universal which she still needs to make h the perfect bride of Christ.

In lesser ways Christian Missions has been savoring salt and has favored the nations with ma benefits of mind and body, which, inasmuch as th were done unto the least of these in Christ's nam will be rewarded by Him.

### Future Foreign Service

The spread of nationalism is not a call to us cease work in foreign countries. The commissi remains unaltered. Mission Boards must now co sider how they can adapt themselves to the ne nationalism.

Let us with joy accept the glorious fact th there are now many new churches, national churc es, sometimes referred to as the younger church

American and European older communions must welcome the younger as children of their own begetting. They are not exact replicas, in every detail, of their spiritual parents, nor should we expect them to be. It may not always be desirable. They are Christ's and ours. They are established in their own native soil. Shall we recognize them and strive to work with them? Or shall we ignore them and strive to work alone in spite of them? They exist, they are there, the land is theirs. Surely it is our duty to recognize the Church of Christ newly formed elsewhere and, to the utmost of our power, strive to work with it. Let us be to them aids, counsellors and guides in as far as they desire us to be. We must ever remember that the end is one Church only, with but one Head and King. It will be so and, in the interim, we must strive to make it so.

This may mean that the home church will send out men to serve communions as counsellors — not to rule the roost and be a "mission" but to be servants of another church. For example, qualified ministers may go forth to be professors in distant seminaries. What greater influence could one be asked to exert than that?

We must also remember that it is the God-given task of the national to spread the Word throughout his own land. Our churches know that the only way to grow is to witness, and it is exactly the same for these younger churches. In pioneer days the only witness had to come from afar; today he is replaced by hundreds who are born again on the spot and can far more effectively use the language of their own people. So the task, for us, is changing.

Undoubtedly the new nations are still looking for specialists in industry, education and medicine. They are by no means so keen on the minister of religion. India's attitude reflects this. The evangelist or minister has little or nothing to contribute to the economic welfare of the people and they bring trouble to existing religious systems.

The home church must prayerfully consider whether it is its job to supply institutional workers. It may have doubts when the work seems unrelated to, or only superficially related to, the Church. This should not preclude the consecrated layman from considering whether or not he has a contribution to make. Such work could be largely, if not wholly, at the expense of the national institution served. Certainly there is a widening field for the Christian layman even though his work is not controlled by a Mission Board.

### In Conclusion

To sum up let us give profound thanks to Almighty God for the great length of time He has allowed the occidental churches to witness for Him throughout the world. Moreover, let us joyfully welcome with open arms the fragrant and large bouquet of younger churches which have been won by and presented to our Lord Himself. Again let us acknowledge that nationalism has come to stay and seek to discover the best means of continuing our work in view of the changed status it gives us. Lastly, let our Mission Boards decide to co-operate with the young national churches in every way possible, especially in contributing the best ministers and other Christian specialists, to aid them in coming to full maturity.

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# Pages From the Past

For the Centennial Year — a collection of contemporary accounts and documents which reflect something of the origins and the developing life of the Christian Reformed Church. Selected and edited by Dr. George Stob.

## *The Immigrant Hollanders and the Dutch Reformed Church in America*

The Hollanders who emigrated to America in 1846-47 had called for aid from the "faithful in the United States of North America." By these "faithful" were intended especially the Hollanders of the Reformed faith who had long been settled in America. These were the members and leaders of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, as it was then called. This church had been established in colonial America in 1628 — the first organized Christian church on American soil.

The members of this church residing on the eastern seaboard — and especially such men as Rev. Thomas De Witt of New York City and Dr. I. N. Wyckoff of Albany — did give much help to the Holland immigrants. As the immigration movement continued, the Dutch Reformed leaders and people increasingly sensed their obligation not only to help them along in their travels, but also to offer them more permanent spiritual and ecclesiastical fellowship. This interest and obligation is reflected in the following writings.

In *The Christian Intelligencer* of March 11, 1847, p. 138, the editor, Rev. Thomas De Witt, wrote:

THIS MOVEMENT in the emigration from Holland is of great interest. There is wisdom necessary in conducting it, and the next summer will witness the character it will assume here. The interest in it has been felt and practically manifested among evangelical Christians of other denominations. *Surely, surely,* it becomes the *Reformed Dutch Church in America,* in remembrance of her ancestry, and the common standards of faith and worship, to advance this movement with peculiar interest, and, as the providence of God may open the way, to throw in a large measure of sympathy and cooperation.

Not only the members and the leaders, but the official agencies of the church were responding to the immigration movement. The Board of Domestic Missions of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, in particular, took note of the opportunity and challenge for western mission work in the Western Michigan settlement.

The following item appeared in the report of the Board of Domestic Missions in June 1847:

A new body of Pilgrims has reached our shores from Holland, the land of our fathers, and the shelter, in ages gone by, to outcasts by persecution. The movement will not lose on the score of its moral grandeur by comparison with any associated act of emigration in the history of our country. . . . Ourselves will be recreant to the power of our principles, to the name we are honored to bear, and the descent we may warrantably boast, if we fail to welcome them, to cheer them in their enterprise, and to express our love, not in word and tongue, but in deed and truth. Providence has cast the lot of the first detachment in the immediate vicinity of our Western churches; a second has arrived, and thousands more are on their way — and we now have brought within our reach an opportunity for securing the accession of a people, "poor and afflicted," it is true, yet possessed of a faith precious, tried and purified. (Report on Domestic Missions, *Acts and Proceedings*, General Synod of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, June 1847, Art. XVIII, pp. 191, 192).

In response to this, the General Synod passed the following resolutions in its meeting of June 1847:

*Resolved,* That we hereby express our sympathy with the Emigrants from Holland, and that we commend them to the prayers, attentions, kind offices and practical regards of our churches.

*Resolved,* That we regard Christian Education to be pre-eminent among the instrumentalities God has placed in the hands of the Church, and that we especially commend it to the attention and fostering influence of all our churches, in relation to the necessities of the West. (*Ibid.*, p. 196).

With reference to a small group already established in Grand Rapids, Mich., but somewhat languishing, the Board of Domestic Missions reported, in 1848:

The missionaries speak particularly of the necessity of sustaining our enterprise at Grand Rapids not only on account of the importance of the place, but also because a large colony of Hollanders, consisting of some three thousand souls — to which during the present season, there will be large accessions — have located themselves in that vicinity. Other denominations are using active measures to bring them under their influence, while we, who are of the same origin, springing from the same branch of the Reformation, and adopting the same standards, are doing nothing but exposing them to be swallowed up by men of every name and every need. These settlers are for the most part men of property and of the highest moral and religious character, and have come over with strong preference for the Reformed Dutch Church. (Report on D

mestic Missions, *Acts and Proceedings*, General Synod, Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, Sept. 1848, Art. XVIII, pp. 424, 425).

Upon receipt of this report, the General Synod of Sept. 1848, adopted the following resolution:

*Resolved*, That the Board of Missions be recommended to give especial attention to the wants of Protestant Hollanders, with a view to bringing them into connection with our own Church, upon which, on account of their origin, they have greater claims than upon any denomination in our land, and to which they are most nearly assimilated. (*Ibid.*, p. 427).

The Board of Domestic Missions found stimulus not only from this action of the General Synod, but also from letters, such as the following addressed by an elder in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to that Board:

At the time Rev. Mr. Taylor (minister in the Reformed Church at Grand Rapids — Ed.) left us, there were a few Hollanders residing in the village, who met with us in the forenoon, and in the afternoon they held a prayer-meeting at a private house. Lately they have occupied our church. They have three services a day. They now number from eighty to more than a hundred. Yesterday (Sabbath) Domine Upma (i.e., Rev. M. A. Ypma, minister of the church at Vriesland, in the Holland colony — Ed.) preached here and administered the sacrament. There were more than a hundred persons in the congregation, about forty communicants. These are from the four churches in Ottawa county. They are poor, working in and about the village. Many of them walk from five to seven miles every Sunday. They are pious, devoted, exemplary Christians.

Since Mr. Taylor left, Domine Van Der Meulen (Rev. C. Vander Meulen, minister of the Zeeland church in the Holland colony — Ed.) has administered the sacrament once; Domine Upma twice, and as often as they can they walk twenty-eight miles (mostly through dense woods) to meet their scattered sheep. Now, dear brother, they are very anxious to have an American missionary. They are studying our language, and they learn fast. These people cannot aid much in supporting the Gospel at present, yet they will do what they can; and so soon as we can get a supply for this church, it will be an inducement for many permanently to settle here.

I feel deeply both for the Hollanders and the church at this place, and I feel that I cannot drop this all important subject without making one more appeal to brethren at the East. For past favors we feel thankful. We feel that you have done much, and your labor and money have not been spent in vain; for there are some praying souls here through your instrumentality. (*Report of the Board of Domestic Missions* to General Synod of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, June 1, 1849, pp. 9, 10).

As a result of these representations, the Board of Domestic Missions took action which was reported in the same Report:

According to the recommendation of Synod, the Board have given "special attention to the Protestant Hollanders, with a view to bringing them into connection with our own Church." Immediately after their organization in the fall, they requested and appointed the Rev. Dr. Wyckoff to visit them for this purpose. He has accepted the commission and entered upon the work. (*Ibid.*, pp. 14, 15).

In the next issue of the *Journal* there will be given large excerpts from Dr. Wyckoff's historic report, and developments in the Holland colony following upon his visit.

# John Schepers

J. G. Vanden Bosch

"First in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen," thus Henry Lee, the Virginian orator, characterized George Washington in unforgettable phrase. To be first in important situations or achievements is something the world singles out for special honor. It connotes a distinction which is more than a matter of chronology. Sometimes it savors even of the romantic. It enlists several qualities in the human spirit that make the distinction possible. Sometimes it displays adventure, careful planning, persistence as it did in the case of Peary who discovered the North Pole. Generally it exhibits courage as it does when a regiment of an army is the first to scale the heights of the enemy. And always it springs from faith in the project in which one happens to be interested. So, to Rev. W. H. Van Leeuwen belongs the honor of having been the first minister serving important charges across the sea to have enough faith in the movement of 1857 to accept the call of a church in Grand Rapids. A similar honor is due to Rev. John Schepers, for he was the first minister of the gospel in the Christian Reformed denomination to receive his entire training in America; and there are other firsts to his credit as will be pointed out in the course of this narrative.

# John Schepers — Continued

At this point it may be expedient for the sake of clearness to state that the subject of our sketch should not be confused with Rev. Jacob R. Schepers, also a clergyman in the early years of the Christian Reformed denomination. They were cousins. Jacob R. Schepers had studied at Hoogeveen, where Rev. W. A. Kok was preceptor, but had not finished his course. Coming to America, he settled on a farm and became an elder in the church at Zeeland. For a while he preached under the auspices of his consistory for a group of members living in nearby Groningen. Soon thereafter a small community a little distance south of Holland that had left the church at Graafschap, having learned about his preaching, invited him to conduct their services. Being denied admission by classis, this community sought ecclesiastical shelter in the fold of the Associate Reformed Church (later United Presbyterian, by the settlers known as *de schotsche kerk*) and was gladly received. The group was organized and Jacob R. Schepers was examined and ordained as its pastor. This happened in 1852. In 1864 a small group of Holland immigrants at Lafayette, Indiana, invited Rev. Schepers to labor among them, the result being the organization of a United Presbyterian Church. However, language was a hurdle that these Hollanders could not clear, and so, not feeling at ease in their new ecclesiastical relations, they, under the leadership of Rev. J. R. Schepers, united with the Christian Reformed denomination. In 1870 Rev. Schepers accepted a call from East Saugatuck church; in 1875, one from the church at Cincinnati, where he died in 1878.

But Rev. John Schepers is the subject of our biographical sketch. He was born at Hijken, Drenthe, May 25, 1837, where he lived until he was twelve years old. His parents were ardent adherents of the Secession of 1834. Young Schepers, therefore, lived his boyhood days in an auspicious time, when the fervor of a fresh religious movement springing from the deep needs of a spiritually famished people was running high and strong. In an altogether too brief autobiographical essay Rev. Schepers tells us that as a boy he often listened to the conversations of older people about salvation experienced and the sorry state of religion prevailing in the state church. He was a witness of how those who worshiped God according to the dictates of their consciences — Seceders they were called — were harassed by government officials. All this made a vivid impression on the boy, which life in the new world did not erase from his soul. Rather, the religious environment of new Drenthe was such as to strengthen it. Loyalty to the Reformed faith was in him not merely a tradition, but a conviction. Too long and too seriously had he wrestle with the wiles and the power of his sinful heart, to long and too grimly had he coped with the proble of personal salvation and its assurance, and too ofte had he heard doctrinal and ecclesiastical difference discussed in the parental home, not to have stron convictions of what he deemed to be the truth.

In 1849 John Schepers came to America with hi parents, who settled in the vicinity of Drenth Michigan. This was shortly after the founding c the settlement, where, naturally, pioneer condition prevailed. Privation and hardship were commo experiences. Land had to be cleared of trees an underbrush before crops could be raised. Settle were content with the simplest fare. Danger an hazard were not unusual, for the settlers were ex posed to the miasm that rose from decaying veg tation in stagnant pools, to the poison of insect and reptiles, to the ravages of wild animals of th forest, and to the loneliness that was oppressive an occasionally unbalanced the weaker-minded. T counterbalance these disadvantages there were th spaciousness of the new environment, the thrill c undertaking a new venture, the promises the ne venture held in its bosom, and the buoyant powe of the Christian faith, all of which inspired th settlers with invincible optimism. In short, youn Schepers grew up amid pioneer conditions, acquire the pioneer attitude, and thus received excelle preparation for doing the work of the pioneer i the domain of the spiritual. God providentially pr pared the young man for the kind of work he wa to do later.

In those days there was dire need of ministe of the gospel. Rev. K. Vanden Bosch of Noordelod was not able to minister adequately to the spiritu needs of the churches depending upon him. Alread in 1861 he raised the problem of how to secure th ministers so sorely needed. Nothing was done. I 1863 he again raised the problem, but, though th churches felt the seriousness of the situatio classis did not see its way clear to do more than issue an appeal to anyone desiring to be traine for the ministry to offer himself at a future mee ing. In that same year, a serious young farme John Schepers by name, who pondered the needs his church and took them to heart, was made mourn the loss of his wife through death. Undoub edly the sorrow that filled his heart made him thi more seriously still. Was the calamity that ove took him not a hint from heaven that he should d vote his life to the ministry of reconciliation and do something for the strengthening of his ow group of churches? At any rate, the young farm from Drenthe responded to the appeal of classis its session held in August, 1864, and offered hi self. In view of the smallness of the group

churches this was not only a courageous act on the part of John Schepers, but it as well revealed the faith of the man, his faith in the future of the Dutch in America, in the integrity of his cause, in the future of his denomination, and in the faithfulness of his God.

So then the appeal was not in vain. Classis must have been encouraged to find that at least one answered the call for volunteers. It adopted him as its student provided he at its next meeting could show sufficient promise by reading an essay on I Timothy 1:15 — "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation that Christ came into the world to save sinners." October 13, 1864, was the decisive day. John Schepers read his essay before classis which met at Graafschap. It was the judgment of classis that the performance left much to be desired, but in view of his inexperience in addressing an audience and his stage fright it felt free to accept him as a student. This decision was the more easily made, no doubt, because he was able partly to finance his education. Because of the Civil War, it must be remembered, these were lean years: prices were inflationary and money was scarce.

Mr. Schepers disposed of his farm and began his studies with Rev. Wilhelmus H. Van Leeuwen of Grand Rapids, whom classis had charged with the task of teaching him. One detail in the instruction of classis should not escape our attention; it was that he should study English, a note that one was not likely to hear from the leaders of later immigrants. In 1867 Rev. Van Leeuwen accepted a call to Paterson, New Jersey, so that Mr. Schepers moved to Graafschap to continue his training with Rev. D. J. Vander Werp. Having studied four years and received a call from First Chicago, he submitted himself for his final examination to the classis that met in Noordeloos, September 3, 1868. The men who examined him were Rev. R. Duiker, Rev. W. H. Frieling, Rev. F. Hulst, Rev. K. Vanden Bosch, and Rev. D. J. Vander Werp. The sermon preached at this occasion was based on Colossians 1:13 — "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness and hath translated us into the kingdom of his son." What arrests our attention in the report of this final examination is that in dogmatics the questions centered on the subject of the covenant of grace, a circumstance which perhaps sheds light on the theological thinking of that time. The examination was satisfactory and Mr. Schepers was about to undertake the work of a minister of the gospel.

The first field to enjoy the labors of Rev. J. Schepers was First Chicago, now Berwyn, which when organized in 1867 by Rev. W. H. Frieling numbered only fifteen families. He who had been a pioneer farmer and a pioneer student now was what might be called a pioneer minister in charge of a young church in a section of the fast-growing industrial city of Chicago. It took pioneer courage to cast in his lot with the small group of immigrants, especially since the man who had been the congregation's first choice, Rev. Bernardus De Bey, an able and experienced man who had been pastor of a large congregation at Middelstum, Groningen, for twenty-two years, was pastor of a neighboring church. But the inexperienced Rev. Schepers built wisely and faithfully and the church enjoyed a slow but constant growth. The reading of the minutes of the consistory for the period, sometimes disagreeable enough because of the need of dealing with church members whose conduct was irregular, is repeatedly brightened by the spirit of love that prevailed and by accounts of additions to the membership roll, either by letter or by profession of faith.

After two and a half years of service in First Chicago, Rev. Schepers felt constrained to heed the call of the church at Lafayette, Indiana. Here he did not have to work from the ground up, since foundations had been laid by his predecessor, Rev. J. R. Schepers. However, there was still need of directing the activities of his people and of accustoming them to new ecclesiastical ways. Growth was slow because not many immigrants settled in Lafayette, but peace and harmony prevailed.

In 1876, having given five years of his best to the church at Lafayette, Indiana, Rev. Schepers took up the shepherd's staff to wield it over the flock at Ackley, Iowa. Now his sphere of labor was in a small church on the far flung prairies of Iowa. Again he became the first pastor of a church, which though organized eight years before, was still small and struggling. A pioneer he was in a pioneer community made up of Hollanders who were surrounded on every hand by Eastfrisians, some of whom were Lutherans, others Reformed. The nearest neighbor, ecclesiastically, was the church at Wellsburg, not many miles distant and mostly vacant at this time. Pella, where the next nearest congregation existed, was almost a hundred miles away. At Ackley, westernmost outpost of Christian Reformed territory, far removed from the center of denominational life, he may at times have felt pioneer loneliness, but one looks in vain for a sign of discouragement. Rev. Schepers labored patiently and faithfully. With wisdom and tact, with kindness and firmness he did much to give solidity to the Ackley group. Members of the church chose one of his birthdays as the occasion for purchasing new pulpit furniture and remembering the good dominie with a substantial purse.

Next divine providence led Rev. Schepers to Vogel Center, a young settlement in the woods of Michigan a full hundred miles north of Grand Rapids and

## John Schepers — Continued

named after John Vogel who operated a sawmill here. If anywhere, here life was still in the pioneer stage. If readers could have a look at an old photograph, still extant, of the first church and parsonage, they would see a church built of logs and the field across the road cluttered with dead wood and stumps. Again Rev. Schepers was the first pastor of a young congregation situated in an outlying section of the church. For leadership in the community he by virtue of native sagacity and experience was amply qualified. He was the nestor of the community in matters both spiritual and secular, never forgetting, however, that it was his prime duty to nourish the life of faith, hope and love, and to build the church. As the community grew his congregation also grew and in course of time some left the mother church, swarm-like, to be given separate existence, he directing the organization of three new congregations. Others came into being after his time. It was in this northern community that Rev. Schepers was able to display the peculiar gifts of leadership with which God had endowed him. In a sense, the community itself is a lasting memorial in honor of this worthy servant of God. With but slight change the following lines from the English poet Goldsmith are pertinent:

> A man he was to all the country dear,
> And passing rich with forty pounds a year;
> Remote from towns he ran his godly race,
> Nor e'er had changed nor wished to change his place;
> Unpracticed he to fawn, or seek for power,
> By doctrines fashioned to the varying hour;
> Far other aims his heart had learned to prize,
> More skilled to raise the wretched than to rise.

As far as the writer knows, there are no sermons of Rev. Schepers extant, but, though he was not a gifted pulpiteer, we can be sure that he adapted his messages to the needs of his people, who after six days of unremitting toil were hungry for spiritual nourishment. Perhaps the autobiographical essay he wrote for the church yearbook contains the clue to the kind of sermons he preached. By far the greater part of it is devoted to an account of his conversion. May we not infer that in his preaching the subjective aspects of the Reformed faith were stressed, at least were by no means slighted as they should not be? This does not mean that he neglected interpretations of Scripture and the setting of doctrinal truth. Be this as it may, an old photograph of the dominie sitting in his study shows him to have been the owner of a large library which he acquired assuredly not for show, but for use. Evidently, like a good student, he knew the value of books. And what a fine pastor he was. The soft-spoken, the kind, the openhearted, and the sympathetic Rev. Schepers could not help being a tender shepherd of his people. Wherever he labored, he endeared himself to all. Some have spoken of him as a father Israel. Once again, how apt the words of Goldsmi

> But in his duty prompt at every call,
> He watched and wept, he prayed and felt for all;
> And as a bird each fond endearment tries
> To tempt the new-fledged offspring to the skies,
> He tried each art, reproved each dull delay,
> Allured to brighter worlds, and led the way.

The colleagues who knew him well spoke of him a man endowed with a good mind and warm hea a worthy man, a beloved brother, with whom it w a delight to spend a social hour. In classical me ings, his words, though few, were seasoned with w dom and sanity.

Rev. Schepers was married twice. His first w was Jane (Jantje) Rabbers, daughter of the ent prising Jan Rabbers, who in 1847 came to Amer with Van Raalte and his party and who owned grist mill in Groningen, in which the maternal gra father of the writer served as miller. One son w born to this union. His second marriage was w Johanna Van Strien, with whom he had seven ch dren, four sons and three daughters. None of t children are living today. An illness of only a f days ended the life of this man of God in the mon of August, 1902. The more than one hundred fi carriages that rode behind the hearse in the fune cortege were a solemn tribute to the high esteem which Rev. Schepers was held by the entire co munity. People traveled twenty miles to attend t funeral rites. Rev. M. J. Marcusse of the neighb ing church at Lucas officiated.

To compose this brief life story of the R John Schepers has been a delight. The more t writer came to know about him, the surer he w that God had, in Rev. Schepers, blessed the chur with one of its noblest sons, whose name deser to be resurrected from oblivion. For thirty-fo years this worthy man was given the honor of doi the duties of an ordained minister, first in Chica the booming metropolis of the midwest, then in comparatively small city in Indiana, next in a ru community on the prairies of Iowa, finally in a ty cal settlement in the woods of northern Michig Does this resume of churches served suggest an climax? It should not. Rather, and most emph ically, it should suggest climax. Like Paul, R Schepers in a sense entered new fields and l foundations rather than base his labors on wh others before him had done. True, he never mann a pulpit in one of the large congregations which it generally deemed an honor to serve, but he did kingdom work on the outskirts, and he did so glad Measured by the high and holy standards of heav Rev. Schepers belongs to the great. Did not Jes say that he who is willing to be least and to be t servant of all is to be counted among the great the kingdom of heaven?

# Open Door for All Sinners

by George Stob

THE 1956 SYNOD of the Christian Reformed Church will be known as an historic Synod for at least one reason. It was the Synod at which the Church abandoned her 100-years maintained and 2-years disputed position on the membership of persons divorced and remarried.

It is hard fully to estimate as yet the significance of this change of position. Is this really, as some might maintain, an unhappy evidence of our yielding to the pressure of practical considerations, and does the change of position mean that we have swelled off to some measure of conformity with the prevailing morals of American life? Or is this, as others might want to say, a bright and hopeful sign that the Christian Reformed Church is putting aside her too easy tendency to live by institutional rules and is learning to live by and rely on the authority and power of the Word of God? If it is the first, we might well be afraid for our future. If it is the second, we may take courage and move on to new tasks and challenges with a strength and confidence born of new trust in the Word and Spirit of God.

### Position Without Advocates

One might have hoped that the traditional position on the membership status of those divorced and remarried had been abandoned after a Synodical debate in which the issues had been squarely and forthrightly joined. As it was the traditional position seems simply to have fallen for want of advocates or defenders. There were still a few voices speaking out of fear of "letting the bars down," and a few others endeavoring still to prove the thesis of continual adultery by a kind of inferential logic. But there was no confident attempt to base the old position on the clear witness of the Bible, so that it fell by default and from the sheer dead weight of its untenability.

The role played by the Study Committee on Divorce and Remarriage was a bit startling. This Committee had on three occasions (1954-55-56) submitted a report to Synod in which the claim was made that the "cumulative and inferential argumentation" which they employed established the "thesis of continual adultery." They therefore recommended the maintenance of the traditional position as adequately grounded in Scripture. After their report had been submitted for the third time, however, Dr. John Kromminga, the Secretary of the Committee, and the writer of its report, registered himself as doubtful and uncertain of his Committee's claim. On May 8, 1956, Dr. Kromminga informed his Committee that he could no longer subscribe in every part to the report on Divorce and Remarriage. He made it clear that he did not repudiate the claim that there was a kind of Scriptural evidence for the thesis of continual adultery. But he rejected, specifically, the "extremely significant claim" that this evidence "conclusively substantiates the position with respect to continual adultery."

This greatly embarrassed the Committee on Divorce and Remarriage. The Committee informed Synod that Dr. Kromminga's change of mind "places the report which he himself has formulated at a great disadvantage." The Committee, therefore, unanimously asked Synod that they be given "the coming year to restudy our mandate and conclusions and then report in 1957." There was some hope that Synod might see that, in view of the indecision of one Committee member, "another year of study by the Committee is surely not superfluous."

A minority of one member of the Advisory Committee, along with two Faculty Advisers — Dr. Herman Kuiper, and Dr. Ralph Stob — recommended that this additional year be given. For this recommendation these remarkable grounds were given: (1) "It is self-evident that this Committee which seeks to substantiate the present position . . . re divorce and remarriage is severely handicapped in presenting its report to this Synod," and (2) "To have this Synod adjudicate the controversy concerning the divorce and remarriage question under these circumstances may well jeopardize the peace of our churches." Synod appeared to have no heart, however, for the recommendation to postpone decision, and less heart for the grounds adduced for such postponement. It was therefore decided by a very large majority to proceed with consideration of the question. Synod, no doubt, felt that there was some point to the statement of a recent *Banner* article (June 22, 1956, p. 777), that "there are issues confronting our Synod which is in session right now, issues that cannot be dodged." And Synod had no intention of dodging this issue.

Some days later Synod was ready to take up the Advisory Committee's report, and its recommendation that Synod change its stand on Divorce and Remarriage. Before the report was taken up, four members of the Committee on Divorce and Remarriage (Revs. William Kok, B. J. Haan, H. N. Erffmeyer, and J. Vander Ploeg) submitted a letter to Synod stating that they were "not in a position to

report at this time in view of the circumstances which have been previously stated." The Committee again asked for opportunity "to report at a later date in the event that Synod should deem it wise to have us continue our efforts." It was decided, however, that the Report on Divorce and Remarriage was indeed before Synod — as it had been before the Church for three years — even though its signers were not ready to stand by it and defend it. But the action of the Committee left their report at an even greater disadvantage than it suffered when Dr. John Kromminga changed his mind. At this juncture, the traditional position seemed to have become a position without advocates.

### The Peril of the Negative

The Advisory Committee proposed to Synod a position that was something of a half-way station between the traditional position and its complete abandonment. Its basic recommendation was that "The Synod of the Christian Reformed Church refrains from declaring that marriage after unbiblical divorce is either continual adultery or is not continual adultery, since there is no conclusive substantiation for either thesis in the Scriptural data that have been advanced."

There was absolutely nothing to commend this statement to acceptance except the possible hope that it might appear to be the kind of statement which might please many and least offend others in the Christian Reformed Church. It might, therefore, even though it lacked clarity and conviction, be considered a prudential statement. Apart from that wholly questionable value, there were these strictures: (1) There seemed to be no point whatsoever in adopting a declaration to "refrain from declaring." (2) The negative of the declaration was not as negative as it seemed. It contained the positive declaration that one *could not prove* from Scripture that a certain person was *not* living in adultery. This kept the "old leaven" of the old position — which allowed the presumption that those divorced and remarried *were* living in continual adultery. Only, it gave firmer basis for this presumption by the declaration that one could not prove from Scripture that it was not so. (3) This declaration would have left Consistories and Classes the liberty of maintaining the old position for themselves, since even Synod would in this case have declared that it is not proved that marriage after unbiblical divorce "is not continual adultery."

It is not strange, therefore, that the proponents of the traditional position, including members of the Study Committee, were anxious to get to the recommendation of the Advisory Committee. There was a long debate as to which of the reports and recommendations should be first considered, but at last it was determined that due order required th the reports of Synod's own Study Committees we to be considered in first order.

Thereupon Synod considered the first and ba recommendation of the Committee on Divorce a Remarriage. This was a recommendation th Synod adopt as its first ground for its position t following:

> Those who have been divorced and remarried contra to Scriptural requirements have entered an adulter relationship which is sinful in its continuation as w as its inception. This interpretation is not only allow but clearly implied in Matt. 5:32; 19:3-9; Mark 10: 12; Luke 16:18. It receives further support from t *analogia fidei*, as reflected in such passages as Gen. 1: 2:24; 5:2; Matt. 14:4; Mark 16:18; Rom. 7:2, 3; I C 7:10-15.

After some discussion this recommendation was jected by a solid majority. By this action it w virtually declared by Synod that the traditio position on divorce and remarriage was witho Scriptural ground.

After this, the recommendations of the Stu Committee on Marital Problems were taken up, a with very little discussion and debate were adopt by Synod. The resolutions thereby adopted w the following:

> 1. No substantial and conclusive Scriptural evide has been produced to establish the thesis that parties married after being divorced on the ground of their a adultery, or divorced on non-Biblical grounds, are liv in continuous adultery.
>
> 2. No substantial and conclusive Scriptural evide has been produced to warrant the demand that a per remarried after being divorced on the ground of his a adultery, or divorced on non-Biblical grounds, must, order to prove the sincerity of his repentance, cease ing in the ordinary marriage relationship with his pr ent spouse.

This meant the complete abandonment of the t ditional position. But there was still a final tempt to salvage something of it by proposing adoption of the negative resolution of the Advis Committee. A motion was therefore offered t Synod declare that

> No conclusive evidence has been produced to estab the thesis that the parties remarried after divorce the ground of their own adultery, or divorced on n Biblical grounds, are not living in continual adultery

This appeared, at first, to be a harmless resoluti and one that would give some satisfaction to th who had been disappointed by Synod's abandonm of the traditional position. But after a bit of d cussion, Synod was alerted to the peril contained this negative, and the motion was voted down b resounding majority.

### Other Resolutions

Other resolutions proposed by the Advisory C mittee were then recommitted to the Advisory C mittee for formulation in the light of the new p tion adopted by Synod. In the concluding sess of Synod the following resolutions were adopted

und out the new position of the Christian Reformed hurch on Divorce and Remarriage:

3. The Consistories are urged most earnestly to guard the sanctity of marriage, and warn unceasingly against every violation of the marriage bond through unbiblical divorce or through adultery, keeping in mind the need for true repentance on the part of all who seek admission to the Church.

4. The Consistories are advised that people who are guilty of unbiblical divorce, or who are divorced as the result of their own adultery, and having remarried, seek entrance or re-entrance into the Church, shall be expected to show their sorrow and repentance during an adequate period of probation. Such cases shall not be settled without the advice of Classis.

5. These declarations are referred to the Consistories for their guidance so that they may deal with the concrete cases which come before them in accordance with the given situations, the demonstrable teaching of Scripture on marriage, divorce, repentance, and forgiveness, and the general provisions of the Church Order.

It is not the happiest circumstance that these atements, formulated in a few days' time by an dvisory Committee at Synod, were considered and opted in the closing hours of the Synodical meetgs. There are some inelegancies in the statents adopted. Further, there is no adequate statent of what is to be considered satisfactory evince of repentance for those who had been divorced d remarried on unbiblical grounds. Again, there the newly stated requirement that sorrow and rentance shall be shown "during an adequate period probation." Why must it be said of only these ns that there must be a period of probation? What to be understood by "probation"? Is it to be ought something like "probation" to which reased criminals are subject? Or is "probation" a mewhat Protestant counterpart of purgatory? inally, by what right is it said that those who rent of the sins of divorce and remarriage shall not admitted without the advice of the Classis — hen the same is not required of reformed drunkds, thieves, liars, murderers? Is it consistent with criptural or Reformed principle to say of sinners a certain kind that Consistories and congregaons may not receive them except with prior Classcal approval? It is understandable that one ynodical delegate, Rev. Gerrit Hoeksema, wanted register his dissent from this latter requirement s decidedly unReformed.

There should have been better occasion to reflect n these statements drafted and proposed by an dvisory Committee than was given to the Synodial delegates in the wearied moments of the dying ynodical session. Even more important, Synod hould more carefully define and delimit the functions of Advisory Committees. It is very bad practice for Advisory Committees to constitute themselves Study Committees, who, after only a few hours of study in between the harried sessions of Synod, place their own newly conceived and formulated declarations before Synod for adoption. Advisory Committees ought to be required to limit themselves to their proper function of passing advisory judgments on the matters given to them for evaluation. There could be no objection to their advising an improved formulation of a proposition submitted to them for judgment. But there is no excuse for Advisory Committees to substitute for the carefully studied propositions of Study Committees or Classical Overtures their own hastily drawn conclusions.

### What Now?

In any event, a profoundly significant change has taken place in the Church's position on the admission or readmission of those who had sinned in matters of divorce and remarriage. Heretofore it was impossible for those who had been divorced and remarried on unbiblical grounds to be members of the Christian Reformed Church, unless they repudiated and ceased to live in their second marriage. It is now possible for such people to be members of the Christian Reformed Church while continuing in the second marriage, *provided* they are and show themselves to be sincerely repentant and believing Christians.

Many people will now assume that the new position of the Christian Reformed Church means that it is possible for people to be unbiblically divorced and remarried without prejudice to their membership. On this assumption, many will be afraid that the bars have indeed been let down, and that our standards have been lowered, so that church membership is now open to a class of undesirables. This, however, is not at all the meaning of the new position of the Christian Reformed Church.

The new position does not mean that the Christian Reformed Church now looks with more kindness and indulgence and charity upon the sins of divorce and remarriage than she did before. The Church is not one whit altered in her conviction that these are grave and heinous sins, and that there is no place either in the Church or in the kingdom of heaven for those who continue in the practice of those sins or in the spirit of such sins. The requirements for church membership — as for entrance into the kingdom of heaven — are as stringent as ever they were. For it is still held, without any compromise or weakness, that none can be received into the fellowship of Christ and His Church except they sincerely repent of their sins and amend their lives.

It is the basic judgment of the new position that such repentance and turning is possible within the relations of the second marriage, and, indeed, that

## Open Door for All Sinners — Continued

such repentance and turning *must occur in that relationship*. The marriage begun in sin must, by the commitment of the whole of its life to the Lord Jesus Christ, be made a holy marriage in the Lord. Such a transformation of a marriage begun in sin is possible precisely because the grace of Christ can enter into a sinful relationship — even as the grace of Christ can enter into a sinful heart and life — and transform it into what is holy and renewed in the love of God.

It was the basic error of the old traditional position that the grace of Christ was something that stopped short of a remarriage after unbiblical divorce, so that sanctification of life and its relationships was possible only outside of that marriage. That judgment made it easy for churches to determine the question of the membership of people divorced and remarried. Consistories did not really have to inquire into moral and spiritual attitudes in such cases. They needed only to take account of legal and biological relationships. If unbiblically divorced people were legally married, and lived in their marriage, Consistories were required to consider them unrepentant sinners for whom there was no place in the Christian Reformed Church.

Now, however, Consistories will have to exer themselves in the very difficult and responsible m ter of moral and spiritual discernment. It will longer be possible for Consistories to discharge th calling to certain people by saying: "Sorry, but si you are married and live in the second marria you cannot be Christian." It is now required Consistories that they do what they are expec to do in making judgments about all other pe who seek to come into the membership of Church of Christ. They must look carefully i the confession of divorced and remarried people w seek membership, inquire into their spirit and m ner of life, and determine whether, as far as m can know, these people are new creatures in Ch or not.

It is not an easy thing to judge in this matter it is never easy to judge whether one is truly Ch tian or not. But the officers of the Church will be without the special grace which the Lord Je gives to those who are called upon to rule and c for His Church in His name. We need only to member that when the Risen Christ returned to disciples He breathed on them and said to the "Receive ye the Holy Spirit: whose soever sins forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whose soe sins ye retain, they are retained."

# The Church and Old Testament History

by Carl Kromminga

IN TWO PREVIOUS PAPERS we have considered the interpretation of Old Testament narrative and the question of typology. One task remains and that is to explore the more "homiletic" aspect of this subject. How are events in the history of redemption to be applied to the Church? More particularly, what is the meaning of Old Testament narrative for the Church?

Those writers who object to the treatment of this material in a way that equates the experiences of the Old Testament believer with those of the New Testament Christian are basically objecting to the lack of *Christocentricity* in this method of sermonizing. Sermons which draw a direct moral parallel between David and the Christian cannot have Christ at their center. This is a serious charge. It should be properly understood. It is readily granted that one may, in the process of drawing the parallel, talk much about Jesus and the way of salvation. One may even speak much of the official position of Jesus. But, it is charged, this does not guarantee Christocentricity. We must see Christ at work in Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and others. Only then are we doing justice to the t that the Bible has Christ as its center.

Those who would deny the name "sermon" to ethical or doctrinal address drawing a direct from the Old Testament to our day have a genu concern for the Christian character of preachi This is good. There is a commendable desire h to see "Christ on every page." Among those w seek reform in this matter there is a real desire catch the vision which Christ Jesus Himself g to the men on the way to Emmaus when He terpreted to them in all the Scriptures the thi concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

The charge against traditional Reformed para preaching, however, is often a bit rashly stated may readily be granted that the relationship of Old Testament narrative to Christ should be m explicitly stated than it is at times. But the t dency to deny the name "sermon" to the exempl method as used by conservative and Reform preachers roots in a failure to appreciate the ba presupposition operating in the minds of those w

have used this method. That presupposition is this, that the Old Testament believer and the New Testament saint pass through essentially the same complex experiences in the life of faith, that they both suffer from trials and temptations which are basically alike, and that redemption for both is a reality only because of the sovereign grace of the faithful God of the Covenant. This presupposition is valid and sound. It has received emphasis in Reformed preaching because the Reformed preacher who was faithful to his calling sought with might and main to refute the dispensational tendency of the Coccejans. And the need for refuting dispensational presuppositions is even greater in this country than in the Old World.

However, even though the Reformed preacher has sought to keep dispensationalism out of his treatment of the Old Testament, he has also tried to recognize the vast *differences* between the Old Testament and the New. It has traditionally been the custom among Reformed preachers to do full justice to the "before Christ" character of the Old Testament. It would be a dark day for our preaching if we should ever fail to make clear to the Church today that the shadow is not the fulfillment!

It is the recognition of the covenant-conditioning of all Biblical revelation which has brought about the kind of preaching which we may call traditional in Reformed circles. No doubt this kind of preaching has been abused. It is possible to be so absorbed in the shadow and the type that one loses sight of Christ and the covenant relationship of believers to God. Any sound criticism of this tendency should be appreciated.

It is also possible to allow the presupposition of ethical preaching on Old Testament narrative to remain an implicit presupposition — to remain only a *presupposition*. But that which is implicit should be explicitly shown. The Old Testament revelation is a revelation in type and prophecy of God's grace *in Christ*, and the lessons of the Old Testament must be applied to the Church by way of Christ. The unfaithfulness of the patriarch Jacob was not just general religious unfaithfulness, but unfaithfulness to the God of the Covenant, unfaithfulness, ultimately, to Christ. Christ is central in the covenant of grace, and the lessons for those who hear the rich promises of God today must be stated in terms of the Church's relationship to God in Christ, through the Holy Spirit.

We should never lose sight of the fact that the Old Testament prefigured Christ *and His Church*. The covenant God is revealed *in relation to His people*. The character of that people is set forth very concretely in the Old Testament. The Church is deprived of necessary instruction if it is not admonished to be faithful to God and not unfaithful as Israel was. David not only prefigures Christ. The Bible shows that he *could not be* what Christ was to be for His people. David is king. He prefigures the King. But he must still call Christ Lord. He is not only ruler. David is also a "classic" subject.

The Church must see the "how much more" in connection with Old Testament history. The great difference between B.C. and A.D. raises the responsibility of the Church to a level even higher than that of Israel. If the word spoken by angels proved steadfast, how shall we escape if we neglect salvation revealed through the Incarnate Son? (cf. Heb. 2:1-4). If it was terrible to reject the voice from Sinai, how much worse it is to reject the voice of the Consuming Fire in the New Testament era (Heb. 12:18-29). Only by carefully noting the similarities and differences between the Old Testament figures on the one hand, and Christ and His Church on the other, can we instruct God's people in the truth as it is in Jesus here and now.


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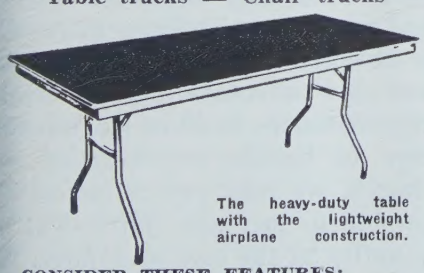

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## Notes and Letters . . .

(*Continued from page* 2)

After thinking the matter over, I thought the Brother might have a point there. And for that reason I congratulate William Boer for his splendid article — both as to content and the spirit in which it was written.

One more incident. Some four years ago in a family of one of our churches, the husband took sick and after lingering some time passed away. The minister of this family conducted the funeral service and when the undertaker's bill came a charge of $10.00 was made for the funeral sermon. This shocked me. It grieved me. Questions arose within me: "Must this poor widow in her 60's, who now must go out housecleaning for a living, pay $10.00 for a few words of comfort and consolation at the funeral? Is it not the work of the pastor to comfort and console the bereaved family in time of mourning? Oh yes, the pastor must live from the gospel but is this not taken care of by the congregation in his call letter? Must an additional charge be paid by this poor widow?". . . .

Respectfully yours,
Andrew DeBoer

*Oak Park, Illinois*

Sirs:

I thought that perhaps Mr. William Boer, author of the excellent article "The Elder at the Meeting of Classis" would be interested in knowing that Classis Pacific has the regulation that the Agenda for the classical meeting must be in the hands of the consistory a full month prior to the session of classis.

This means that for our October session, the agenda must be in the hands of the Stated Clerk by August 15, so that the full agenda reaches the consistories by September 1.

Maybe it would be a good idea for other classes to follow suit.

Fraternally,
B. T. Haan,
Stated Clerk

Sirs:

"Silence means consent" is an adage which likely every writer assumes to be true. Perhaps as readers we ought oftener to write when we do agree, just to encourage the men who express themselves publicly. Most of us suffer from inertia and therefore seldom commend articles we agree with. In fact most of us are even tardy in expressing dissent, I believe, and especially if it be one particular article. However, when one begins to discern a tendency or movement, a cutting loose from a traditional mooring in ecclesiastical thinking, not only time-honored, but also Biblically grounded, a reader ought to arouse himself from his inertia and become vocal. Somehow I sense that spirit in certain articles appearing in *The Reformed Journal*, and therefore request just a little space to express myself. It may be that others are of like conviction, and might be moved to express themselves, and in this way aid in shaping our policy.

What I have in mind in mentioning this cutting loose from Reformed tradition which is time-honored and Biblically grounded is discussions on such subjects as "Divorce and Remarriage" "Quality vs. Quantity" and "Admission Into the Church." To me it seems these articles overlook important considerations, and indicate that we are imbibing more of the *present-day* spirit of ecumenicity than we would like to concede. The *present-day* ecumenical spirit is vastly different than the spirit which controlled the church when the Ecumenical Creeds of the past were formulated. *Then* the church was interested in giving expression to the common faith Biblically grounded. *Today's* ecumenicity is a reducing of the Christian Faith to the least common denominator, so that liberals and orthodox can all subscribe to that faith, and we can be one. It is a false application of the words of our Lord: "that they may be one, even as we are one." Present-day ecumenicity runs counter to the whole spirit of the New Testament, and ignores the fact that Jesus called his church, "little flock." That lit church is borrowing the spirit the world, which is bigness in own eyes, rather than patterni its life after the unity found in t blessed Trinity. Is not the mi and will of God revealed for us the Scripture, and must not tru we proclaim and live be drawn e tirely from the Holy Scriptur Are we not departing from th when we desire to modify our sta on divorce and remarriage? V do not ask: What saith the Scri ture? But we point out the awf consequences which follow fr our stand, and close our eyes the fact that sin, even though f given leaves its lines in the liv of God's children. We cannot ca cel the consequences by refusi to heed God's Word in regard this matter. The plea that the R formed Churches in other lands low more than one ground for vorce is not a reason for us a doing so. The question is rath does an additional ground expre the mind of God in this matte There may be an historical reas for adopting an additional grou but that does not justify the ad tional ground. The only ultima ground for the church is the Scri ture — the revelation of the mi of God. If all Reformed Church in all lands were bent on holdi this one principle, "thus saith t Lord," in determining our poli we would through the process diligent study approach nearer a nearer to the unity of which o Lord speaks, when he says: "th they may be one even as we a one," and such would be true ec menicity. But if certain of o leaders continue to plead for mo and more liberal policies in rega to divorced and remarried perso and now advocate under certa circumstances to allow lodge me bers to become members of o church, we may expect our me bership to increase, but it will quantity at the cost of quality. the new policy, we approach near and nearer the stand of other d nominations, and we will have le and less reason to exist. So one might say: excellent! now are becoming ecumenically mi ed, but such is not the ecumenic

f the church which drew up the Ecumenical Creeds, but the kind advocated by the National Council which is bigness at the expense of truth.

When I read articles of the type alluded to above, which we might call "the new look" from the Reformed point of view, it seems to me that there are at least two things wrong with these pleas. One is, they overlook the fundamental requirements for discipleship, which are requirements for church membership as well. I think of the requirements the Lord himself laid down in Matthew 16:24. Let me mention only *self denial.* The plea to allow unbiblically divorced persons to be members in good standing if they confess sorrow for being remarried, but allow such to remain in that relationship which they say they regret having entered, is for all practical purposes virtually saying: "We do not require such to deny themselves in regard to the marriage relationship." Likewise in connection with the plea to allow under certain circumstances a member of a secret organization to become a member of our church, though Paul says: "What agreement hath the temple of God with idols?") — is not this also based on an ignoring of the demand of "self denial"? In this case, if lodge-membership were allowed, the consistory would be saying, "You can serve the Triune God with us, but you may keep your idol of false religion at least for a while.

The other thing that is overlooked in these pleas is the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the church, as Jesus speaks of it in John 16:13. This promise our Lord has fulfilled and is still fulfilling today. The Holy Spirit leads the church into all truth, but also into the application of the truth. To his guidance we may attribute the gradual breaking of the relationship of the New Testament church with the temple service; the abolition of circumcision; gradual change of observance of the first day for worship instead of the seventh; abolition of polygamy and slavery. Because of this guidance of the Holy Spirit in connection with the Word, the church became a savoring salt in the community in which God placed it, and an enlightening light to the nations to which it brought God's Word. Is it not surprising that after nineteen centuries of such guidance we have Christian leaders who plead that the church surrender its position, and compromise its stand, which means discontinue to be a savoring salt, and cease to be an enlightening light? Instead of striving for ever higher ideals for its members and demanding more of those who desire to enter, we now reverse ourselves, allow our members to lag behind, and let down the bars for those who desire to become members yet wish to continue to live in sin.

Let us rather maintain the standards the Lord has set, surrender ourselves more and more to the guidance of the Spirit in connection with the Word and thus fortify the church with his Word. If we refuse to do this and begin to deflect in the other direction as a church, we will aid the coming of the great apostasy which we may expect at the close of the ages, and which is clearly showing itself already today.

Thank you for the space.

Cordially yours,

C. R. Veenstra

*Oskaloosa, Iowa*

Sirs:

Many of the readers of the now defunct *Calvin Forum* had hoped, on the demise of that paper, that some of its features would be carried on by the *Journal.* Some of the newsletters carried by the *Forum* were good, and should be continued. The best of them, to my mind, was the Ceylon letter which appeared periodically. Would it not be possible for the *Journal* to give some space to that worthwhile item? The writers, I have been assured, are eager to continue the newsletter, which provides about the only general Reformed window on Asia.

Sincerely yours,

George G. Harper, Jr.

*Grand Rapids, Mich.*

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